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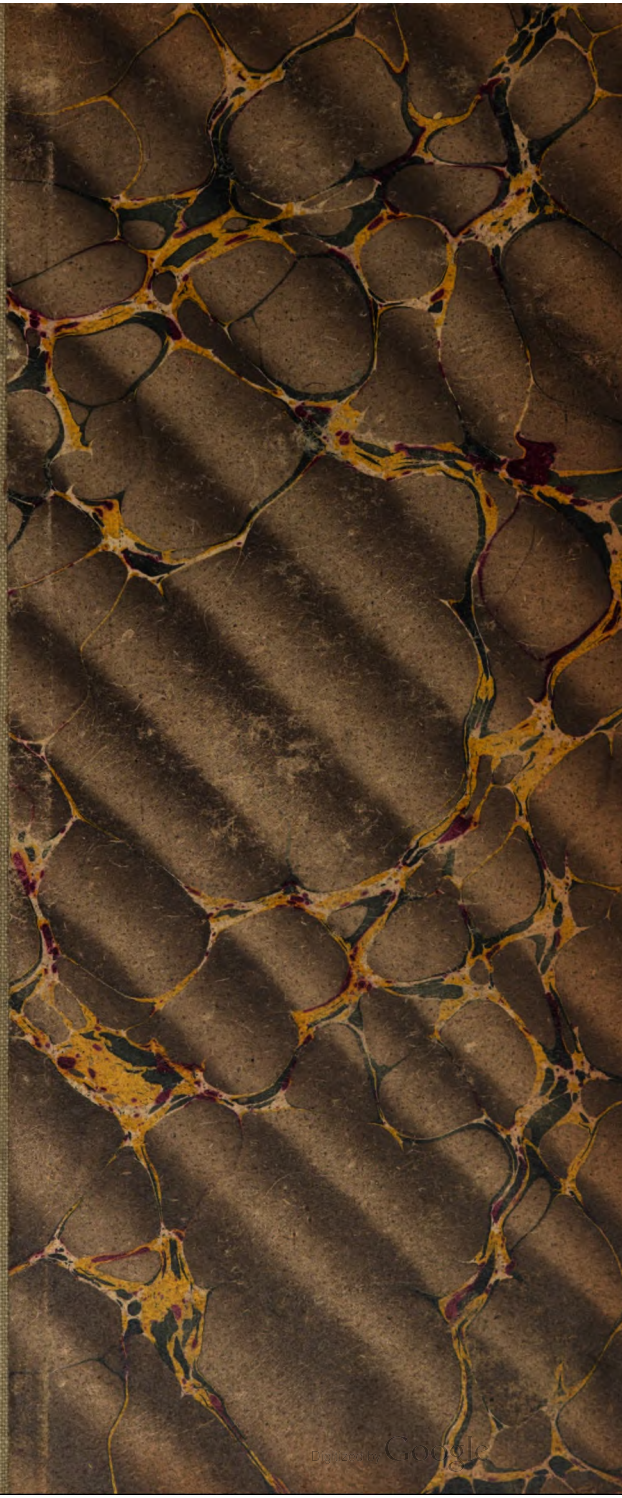
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On Gospel Ministry .1835

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GOSPEL MINISTRY &c.

The preservation of an unadulterated ministry in the religious Society of Friends, depends much on the general state of the members. A body of quickened, spiritual worshippers, if they have any, will have a spiritual gospel ministry. No other description will be tolerated amongst them. It could not long subsist, under the influence of the religious weight and discernment, which would prevail in such a congregation. Mere recitations of the most excellent sentiments, or disquisitions of doctrines, however lucid, would fail to satisfy without the divine unction, which is a savour of life unto life, and baptizes the souls of the hearers. The true gospel stands not in word only, but also in power. It is emphatically the ministration of the Spirit, both immediately, and through prepared instruments, and the divine virtue which attends it, ministers judgment to the man of sin, but refreshes the weary pilgrim. Ministry, and the condition of the hearers, have a reciprocal effect on each other. A ministry of the letter, if countenanced, will cherish a love for words, and that kind of smooth words which leaves the hearers at liberty to enjoy themselves in carnal ease and security. Though it might be very fair, and highly commendatory of the Holy Scriptures, even to exalting them as the guide and rule of life, yet the baptism of the Holy Ghost and fire, and the self denial of the cross, which are peculiar characteristics of Christ's religion, would be kept much out of view, as being repugnant to the delicate and refined feelings of the age.

Superficial hearers would be contented with this kind of preaching, and it will tend to keep them on the surface, and induce them to believe that they are pretty safe, at least as well off as their neighbours, and that religion is not so deep an affair as some others have

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taught. Such persons will speak well of a ministry which creates no disturbance in their false rest, and should some members of antiquated views, or habits of feeling, manifest dissatisfaction, they would soon rise in its defence, and pronounce the opponents exceedingly fastidious and difficult to please. Many nominal professors are too full of other concerns to allow the salvation of the soul to occupy much of their time and thought, and act as if they were pretty nearly prepared to entrust it to those who are daily occupied with religious matters. They appear to think that the cure of souls is the special business of a certain class, and giving themselves very little trouble about their own, or that of any others, they possess no qualification to judge of ministry, or concern whether it proceeds from a living spring or not. If very little more is enjoined upon them, than the daily reading of the Holy Scriptures, they are satisfied with it. That condition can be easily complied with, without trenching much on their business hours, and such ministry will receive their ready approbation. But what becomes of the experimental part of religion, founded on the internal knowledge of the Saviour and of his will? For though the Holy Scriptures were written under divine inspiration, and "are able to make the *man of God* wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus," we do not suppose that inspiration ceased with the revelations made to John the Divine—that we can take up the cross and deny ourselves, and follow Christ in the regeneration, by reading the Bible merely—or that power "to become the sons of God," or men of God, can be derived from any other source, than it was when John wrote his gospel, or before there was any written "volume of inspiration."

This description of ministry which may appear very fair and beautiful outwardly, but destitute of the quickening life, and is better adapted to itching ears, than diseased and distressed hearts, is not new, even in the Society of Friends. Jane Pearson, who

was a painful labourer in the gospel, and one who travailed deeply that Christ might be formed and exalted in the hearts of the people, makes an allusion to it. 'I know not what I am held in this place for, except it be faithfully to suffer with the suffering seed here. I have renewedly felt a precious union with our dear Lord in his crucified state, *in the hearts of professors*. Oh the plungings witnessed in our meetings! There is an active spirit got in, that takes its food upon the surface, or catches at it flying in the airy regions. With food of this nature, some seek to feed and be fed. I have painfully and recently sat under some testimonies, when it seemed clear to me, *sin held its empire*; and what was declared, though sound truths, yet *did not slay the man of sin*.'

There is another class who have been acquainted with the virtue of truth, but from various causes do not feel its quickening power as they once did, that yet at times desire it.—These expect much from preachers, and are very ready to judge and condemn, if their ministry does not always raise them from death to life, forgetting, or not knowing, that the power with which the Head of the church condescends to accompany his ministers, is often proportioned to the sincerity and integrity of those ministered to. There is another point, not always sufficiently adverted to, by those who are very prompt to decide upon ministry—that it requires a measure of the same divine unction to qualify persons to judge, that it does ministers to preach—and that the judges have this qualification no more at command, than the ministers,—and without it mistakes are made in judging as well as in preaching. If the hearers are not in a quickened state, baptized into fellowship with the seed, in which state only a true sense and discerning are furnished, they may condemn gospel ministry, which proceeds from a deeply exercised mind, but may not be delivered with the gracefulness of language or manner, which pleases the taste of fashionable and learned men. Such superficial judges may contribute to

quench the spirit in ministers, as they have done it in themselves. A sound discriminating judgment, which can try words as the mouth tasteth meat, is essential to preserve a sound ministry in the church. None can rightly question the importance of such a gift; but it is contained in earthen vessels, as well as that of the ministry. A habit of lightly speaking of ministry will injure the qualification for judging, as well as the habit of preaching without authority will injure that of a minister. Both tend to bring a cloud over the mind, and to make the impression that there is very little certainty in either, by which the most important offices may be brought into disrepute.

The following instructive remarks of an eminent minister, may be usefully revived: they relate to a subject which materially involves the vital interests of the Society. A wordy ministry will have a blasting effect, and it behooves those who are placed as judges in Israel, to discharge their duty faithfully in a Christian spirit, that a check may be put to it wherever it exists. And as the harvest is great and the labourers few, those who may at times feel the spirit of the Lord stirring in their hearts to prepare them for his service, had need to keep a single eye to it, that in his time they may be duly equipped and sent out to labour in the vineyard. The church has great need of them, and travails that the children may be faithful in all things, and that the best gifts being conferred upon them, they may be "planted in the house of the Lord, and flourish in the courts of our God."

"The church of Christ hath not been without its trouble from false ministers, neither in the primitive times, nor in ours. That excellent gospel liberty of all who feel themselves inspired thereunto, whether male or female, speaking or prophesying one by one, hath been, and still is, abused by false pretenders to divine inspiration; yet the liberty ought to be pre-

served inviolable, and other means found out to remedy this great inconvenience ; which would not be difficult, were the members in a general way spiritually minded, rightly savouring the things that be of God. Forward and unsanctified appearances, by way of ministry, would then be easily awed and suppressed, so as not to disturb the peace of the church. The case has been otherwise, as I have observed in some places, but little minded, if the words and doctrine were sound, and nothing to blame in the conversation. Here the main thing, which is the powerful demonstration of the Holy Spirit, is little regarded : and if a few are deeply pained at heart with such lifeless ministry, they find it exceeding difficult to lay hands thereon, for want of more strength ; especially when they perceive what strength there is against them ; for formal professors love to have it so, rather than to sit in silence. And I have observed such pretenders all mouth or tongue, and no ears to receive instruction ; fond of teaching others, but very unteachable themselves. I pray God to quicken his people, and raise the Society into a more lively sense of that blessed arm of power which gathered us to be a people ; or I fear, the great evil above hinted at will prove a very growing one : profession without possession being the proper element of such a ministry to grow and flourish in. I am not quite free to omit a remark on this head, as I am fully persuaded the living members of the church of Christ groan under a painful sense of this sorrowful token of a declined Society. May the Lord of sabbaoth hear their cries, and regard the anguish of their souls in secret, so as to work by his invisible power for his own name's sake, and their enlargement, by turning his hand again upon our Sion, to purge away her dross, and to take away her tin and reprobate silver ; that her judges may be restored as at the first, and her counsellors as at the beginning ; that many, having their feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, may yet appear beautiful upon the mountains ! So be it, saith my soul !

"I have given some hints how it was with me, by way of preparation for the great and important work of the ministry, and the danger of my being misled: even at times when I had right openings, and felt the sweet efficacious virtue of the love of God, through Jesus Christ, to mankind: which, doubtless, is the sensible experience and enjoyment, at times, of every faithful follower of Christ, who never was called to the work of the ministry. I was in those days apprehensive of some danger of being led out at that door; but I have since more fully and perfectly seen the danger of this and other by-paths, which would have led me to give that away to others, which I was to live upon myself; and out of the humble dependant state, in which alone there is safety, to have a will and way of my own, that I might be furnished and enriched with much treasure. But sincerity of heart, and my endeavours to preserve the single eye, through the watchful care of Divine Providence over me, brought the day of the Lord upon it all; so that I came clearly to see, and experimentally to know, my sufficiency was of God; that there must be a steady dependance on the Lord, to be immediately fitted and supplied, every time I was to engage in this solemn service. I ardently desire, that all who have the least apprehension of being called into the work of the ministry, may dwell in a holy dread of the divine presence, and know their own wills wholly subjected to the divine will, waiting for a distinct and clear certainty of the Lord's requirings not only in entering upon it at first, but also at all other times. And as self comes to be laid in the dust for ever, they will receive undeniable evidence in their own minds of the certainty of their mission: and they will not be without a testimony thereof from the witness for God in the consciences of mankind, amongst whom they are sent to minister. They will be a savour of life to the living in the truth, and of death, to those who are in a state of death. Let it ever be remembered, that nothing of, or belonging to man, can possibly add any lustre or dignity to

so divine a gift. Neither will the best and most curiously adapted words or doctrine, ever so truly and consistently delivered, be any more than as sounding brass, or as a tinkling cymbal, without the power, light, and demonstration of the spirit of Christ. There is no occasion at all, for those who regard his power as the substance of their ministry, to be any wise solicitous about words; as the lowest and most simple are really beautiful, when fitly spoken under that holy influence."

(John Griffith's Journal.)

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